Letter from Taizé

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Taizé
European Meeting of Young Adults
28 December 1995 - 1 January 1996
Wrocław

THE MEETING IN JOHANNESBURG

An African Stage in the Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth

Johannesburg is a city of contrasts. he first and third worlds are found ide-by-side in rare proximity. Built on ie camps of the first gold-seekers, the ity has risen up proudly with its sky-crapers, its elegant architecture, served y a network of highways that has noth-ng to envy in Europe or America. Close y are the "townships," the poor areas f South Africa. Hungry dogs root in iles of garbage. An acrid smoke es-apes from the shacks made of tin and poles. Some streets are almost impass-able. A feeling of insecurity due to the increase in crime is almost the only thing that the city centre shares with the townships. In the fancy neighbour-hoods, security measures have been in-creased and, to discourage any thieves, on the walls of the houses you find the threat: "Armed response." For three months, Taizé brothers and a team of

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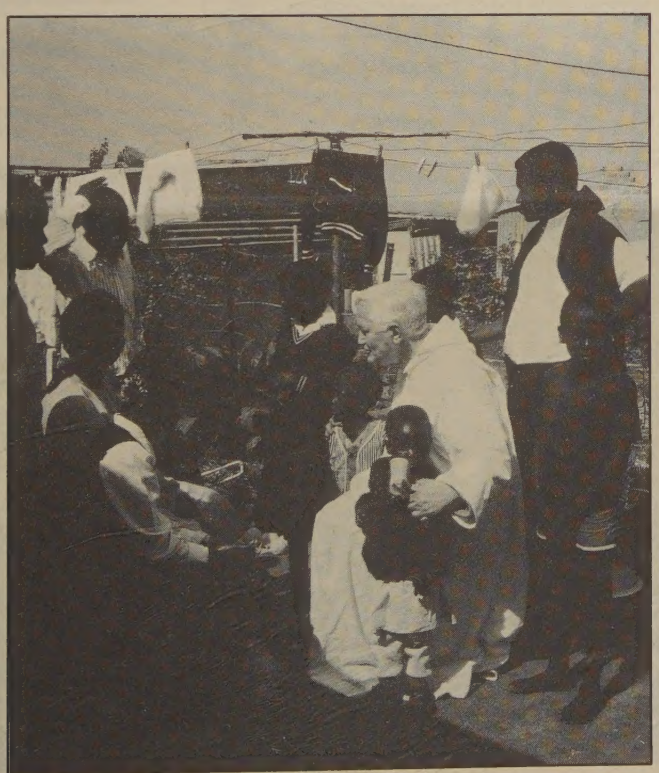

EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS IN POLAND

Preparing in Depth

Some young people from Wroclaw express their reaction to the announcement that the next European meeting will be in their city.

■ "We know, thanks to the previous experience in 1989, that for us to host the European meeting once again is a great opportunity. I see the importance in particular for the life of my parish. We need such occasions for different groups to learn to get to know each other better, and to make contacts with neighbouring parishes. It is also urgent to collaborate more deeply with the priests and build up a relationship of trust with them."

■ "This year, we hope there will be many participants from the East, those who couldn't come last time: from Ukraine, Russia, Belorus, from the Baltic countries. On the map of Europe, Wroclaw is halfway between the North and the South, the East and the West. We need to show that this is not only true geographically, but also humanly speaking."

■ "Six years ago, everyone stayed in families. The homes have not become any larger, but our families love to welcome. We have a proverb: *Gosc w dom, Bog w dom*, A guest in the house, God in the house. Some families have already asked us if we were sure there would be enough visitors for all the families. That's their only worry!"

■ "When I ask myself what this second European meeting in Wroclaw can mean, I see above all for us the responsibility to prepare it very much in depth. Perhaps for the first time, the European

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young people had to cross several times a day from one of these worlds to the other, in order to prepare a stage in the pilgrimage of trust on earth.

When the meeting in Johannesburg began on Friday May 5th, two thousand young people from the townships would be staying in some fifty churches in the centre and north of the city. For most of these participants, this was the first time they ever visited these neighbourhoods. You could read astonishment and joy on their faces the following day when they spoke about the welcome they received. "We never imagined that Whites in the city would one day welcome us like this."

Other groups came from afar: young people from Capetown who made a twenty-hour journey, others from Durban, groups from Harare and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, a hundred people from Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, Lesotho, and even a few from Tanzania.

A LONG-DESIRED MEETING

For the Catholic and Protestant Churches that had invited Brother Roger and the Taizé Community to South Africa, the meeting in Johannesburg came at just the right time, "in particular, at a time when we are emphasizing reconciliation," explained the person in charge of Catholic youth. A few months before the meeting, Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched an appeal for many young South Africans to come and take part in this African stage in the pilgrimage of trust: "Right now in our country, we desperately need to learn to listen to each other and foster trust between our diverse people. To build our nation, we need to strengthen our inner resources. Our new-found freedom brings with it many responsibilities—together we have to protect that freedom and build a peace-loving society which will benefit all its people. We cannot wait for someone else to make it happen. It is up to each of us to venture out in faith, to reach out a hand in reconciliation and build a bridge nobody thought was possible."

ROADS TO RECONCILIATION

Already in the first weeks of the preparation, it became clear that many people are eager to take part in the building up of a new South Africa. But it is not easy to break with the habits of the past. In addition, apartheid created a geographical distance between ethnic groups. Creating new friendships in other districts is not easy. Where and how can it be done? Very few Whites dare to enter the townships because of their reputation, sometimes exaggerated, for violence. Such incursions took place, however, several times as part of the preparation for the meeting; young Blacks from the townships had promised to go and meet the young Whites at the entrance to the district. Reassured, the Whites made the trip. For Billy, from Sebokeng, one of the townships that has suffered most from violence these last years, the meeting was a help to discover very simple roads to reconciliation.

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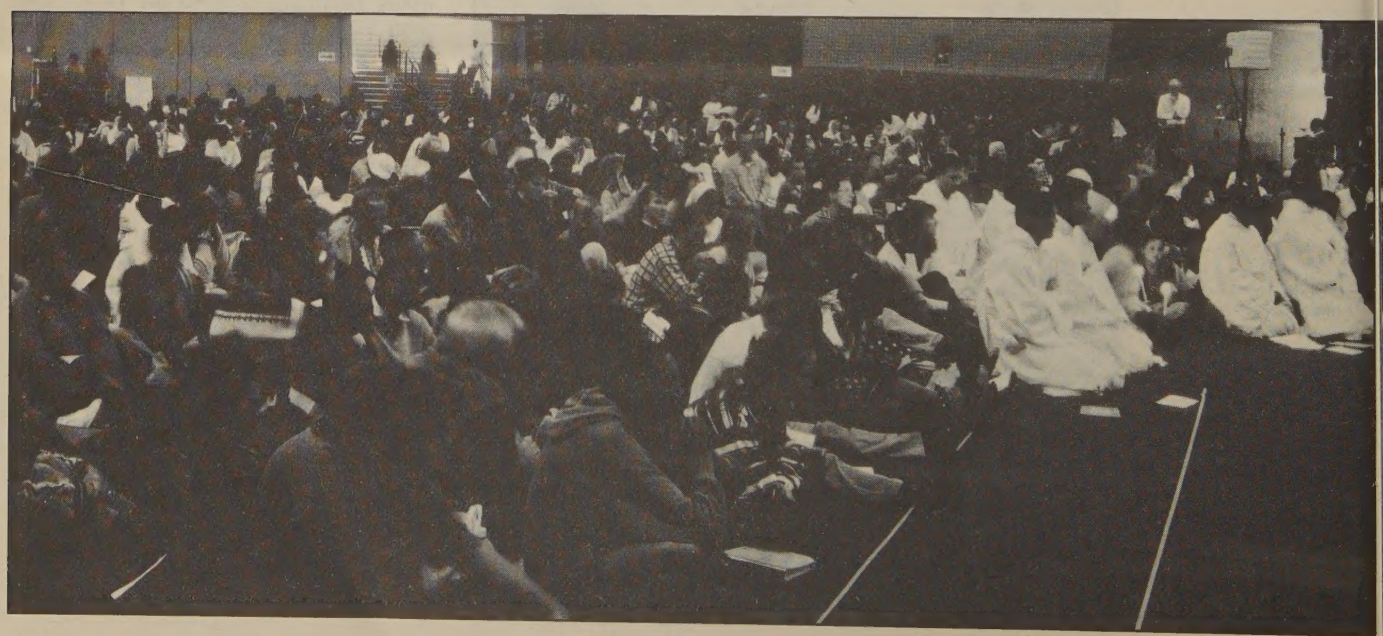
Preparing in Depth

meeting is being held in a city where almost everyone knows Taizé, either because they welcomed participants six years ago or because they themselves took part in a European meeting elsewhere. In Paris, we saw that the welcome was much greater when you come back to the same city for a second time. Personally, I see this as a call to witness to our faith. And it is extraordinary when young people witness to their faith for other young people! For several years now, we have become more attentive to those who remain at a distance from the Church. The catechists who now go into the schools are more aware how indifferent some people are regarding the Church. In this context, the European meeting will be a sign of hope."



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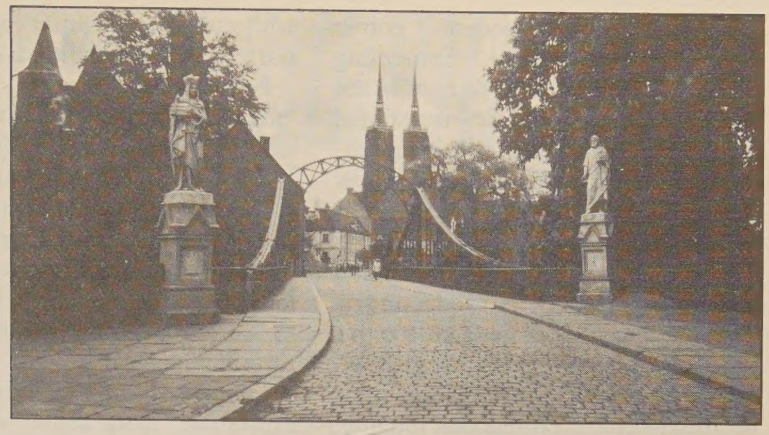

European Meeting of Young Adults in Poland

Wroclaw, 28 December 1995 — 1 January 1996

At the end of this year, tens of thousands of young adults from all the countries of Europe will be welcomed in Poland, in the town of Wroclaw. A new stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth," it will be the eighteenth European meeting prepared by Taizé. Six years ago, at the end of 1989, a meeting had already been held there and memories of the warm hospitality remain present in many. Taking part in the European meeting means preparing oneself to be a ferment of reconciliation in the midst of those around us in our daily life. The welcome in families and parishes helps us to discover, in a tangible way, that peace and trust are possible. The common prayers and the times of group reflection root the search for the meaning of life in a communion in God. Meeting witnesses to a commitment on behalf of others, in parishes and neighbourhoods, helps us to take on responsibilities in our own situation.

Dates: from Thursday 28 December 1995 (arrive between 7am and 12 noon) to Monday 1 January 1996.

Program: Hospitality offered by families and parishes in Wroclaw and the surrounding area. In each neighbourhood, morning prayer followed by a time of reflection and meeting with people committed locally. Every day, two common prayers for all participants in large spaces set up as churches. In the afternoon, workshops on various themes.

Accommodation: Simple conditions, even in families. Bring lightweight mattress and sleeping-bag. This year, almost all the participants will probably stay with families.

17 to 30 year olds:
Those who, in addition to taking part in the life of a parish, can help in the work teams, with the animation of the meetings or in the choir group should arrive on Tuesday 26 December between 8am and 3pm. (Arrival not possible on 27 December).
Those who arrive on 28 December can choose one of three ways of taking part:
+participating in the life of parishes
+silence group (separate accommodation)
+while taking part in the life of a parish, helping in a work team or in the choir group.

16 year olds may come to the meeting only if accompanied by someone over 20 years old who stays with them (one older person for every two younger persons). Arrival: 28 December (not before). They will take part in the life of a parish.

Adults over 30 can take part in the life of a parish. Arrival: 28 December (not before). Those who cannot accept the same simple living conditions as the young people and who need a "real bed" should indicate this on their registration form.

Families with children and people with a disability who need special accommodation should contact Taizé—best to telephone in October or November—to arrange this.

Contributing to the costs: the amount asked of each person (meals, transportation, etc.) can only be given exactly in the autumn. It will be in the neighbourhood of £45 for the whole meeting.

Travel: In each region, groups will organize the journey together. A list of local contacts will be given in future *Letters from Taizé*. From Britain: for special coaches to the meeting contact "Skyliners" (formerly Nuneaton Coaches), 4 Charnwood Avenue, Arbury View, NUNEATON CV10 7PA. Tel (01203) 325682 or 328410.

Send in your registration form by 1 December. If you are coming with a group, send it through the person organizing your group. Those who can organize a group journey should contact Taizé as soon as possible, in any case before 1 November.

Registration Form

Send before 1st December to:
"European Meeting", Taizé Community,
71250 TAIZÉ, France. Tel: (+33) 85.50.30.02
(9-11 am and 3.30-5.30 pm) Fax: (+33) 85.50.30.16.

First Name:

Family Name:

Address:

(with postcode and country)

Tel.: ...../..... Occupation: ..... Age: .....

(Circle "Yes" or "No" or complete where necessary)

- I am coming with a group from the town of .....
led by .....
- For adults (over 30 years) and those who cannot sleep on the floor:
I need a bed: yes / no if "yes", say whether you are (please circle):
woman man couple family with ... children disabled person with helper
- I will arrive on 28th December: yes / no (arrival time between 7am and 12pm)
- I will arrive on 26th December (17-30 year olds only): yes / no
to help with (please circle): animation / work / music team.
- N.B. if, for any reason, you are arranging your own accommodation please send us the address where you will be staying.
- I would like ..... more registration forms (photocopy your own if possible)

Born in God

John 3

By night, Nicodemus comes to see Jesus. Something attracts him. But when he arrives, he is restrained, prudent, perhaps even a little embarrassed. He does not know himself how to express or to ask about what he is looking for.

Jesus "knows what is in human beings" (John 2,25), and so he understands at once that in the depths of his heart, Nicodemus is searching for an encounter with God. And Jesus finds for him words to express that longing: in his night, Nicodemus desires to "see the Kingdom of God" (John 3,3). The same expression, very rare in the Scriptures, introduces the story of the transfiguration in Saint Luke's Gospel. On a high mountain, three of the apostles see Jesus changed into light, together with two servants of God from the past. Seeing the Kingdom of God means seeing God fill the world with his luminous presence.

How can this happen? "No one has ever seen God" (John 1,18; 1 John 4,12), and it is impossible for a human being to "go up to heaven" to see. Only Jesus, who has come from God, "has seen and heard" (John 3,32).

It is precisely in Jesus that Nicodemus, and all people, can see God. When he has given his life out of love, he will be "the Son of Man lifted up," tortured on a cross, but radiant with the presence of God. He will be the fountain of living water, gushing forth to become the river of life that heals the nations (Rev 22,1-2). In him, God manifests himself as the one who gives beyond measure, who fills the world with the light of his love and holds nothing back (John 3,13-16). It is not by chance that Nicodemus reappears in the Gospel at the very moment it is said of Christ on the cross: "They will look upon the one they have pierced" (John 19,37.39).

Then, Jesus invites Nicodemus not only to "*see*" but to "*enter* the Kingdom of God" (3,5). To experience God's love, it is not enough to observe from without; we must enter into it and let ourselves be transformed.

For this to happen, Nicodemus "must be born from above." A short while before, he had said that he knew (3,2). Now he no longer understands. Whereas Jesus wants him to be born *from above*, he thinks he must be born *again*. His horizon is too narrow; he looks back and wonders if it is possible to "enter his mother's womb a second time and be born"!

To excuse him, it can be said that the expression "from above" does indeed have a double meaning and also signifies "again." Our Bibles translate in verses 3 and 7 sometimes what Jesus meant ("from above"), and sometimes what Nicodemus understood ("again"). But as is often the case for the double meanings characteristic of John's Gospel, the difference is decisive. Being born again would mean starting out anew, living one's life over again. But even were it possible to "be born a second time," would it really be worth it? This second life, new and fresh at first, would become old in the same way as the first, like those good resolutions we make at certain moments. And then a third birth would be necessary, and a fourth, and so on ad infinitum.

A birth from above, on the other hand, never grows old. To give Nicodemus a glimpse of this secret, Jesus uses the example of the sound made by the night breeze that he hears springing up outdoors. He says to Nicodemus, "You hear the wind: it blows where it wants, but you do not know where it has come from nor where it is going. That is how it is with anyone born of the Spirit" (3,8). Born of God, someone enters a life that has no starting-point. They no longer know "where they have come from." The person born of the Spirit moves in God, so that it can no longer be said "where they are going," since God is infinite and has no limits.

By saying "born of *water* and the Spirit" (3,5), Jesus affirms that baptism is the sacrament of birth in God. If it was the sign of our resolution to live our life over again, then we would need to be baptized again each time our faith weakened. But the fact that baptism is never repeated confirms that being born from above is more than just being born a second time. Even though we are baptized at a particular moment of our life, perhaps even in a distant past, we never leave our baptism behind. It is sometimes said that tears of repentance are part of the waters of baptism. In both of them, the same Holy Spirit brings us to birth.

"What is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3,6): those who are baptized, participating in the mystery of God, become in a certain sense what God is. They "are spirit" as God "is spirit" (4,24), a life with no beginning nor end. In Biblical language, "being spirit" has nothing to do with a flight from the material world or with a mistrust of the body. On the contrary, "the flesh" opposed to "the spirit" (John 3,6), which "cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15,50), is not necessarily a material or bodily reality; it is often the thoughts or arguments of a person who is imprisoned in a short-sighted, meaningless existence. And conversely, the apostle Paul does not hesitate to use the expression "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15,44) to speak of a human being totally transfigured in God.

Here is how a holy man of the eleventh century described this experience, which is like a resurrection already begun here on earth: "The light unites totally with the whole of our being: a light contemplated in the spirit and from afar, a light that we suddenly discover within us, a light that gushes forth like water, and burns like a fire in the heart which it totally penetrates" (Saint Symeon, known as "the New Theologian").

God is light; God is love (1 John 1,5 and 4,8): he is fire and Spirit. Whoever approaches is burnt and penetrated by brightness. This experience may not leave tangible traces except for the fire warming a heart that awakens to love. By the love we have for one another we know that we are born of God.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

SEPTEMBER

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Ph 4.4-7 Jn 5.1-9

1 FRI Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!

Jn 6.60-69 Ph 4.10-13

2 SAT Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Lk 14.1-14 Heb 12.18-24

3 SUN Jesus said: When you have a dinner, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you.

Jn 10.1-10 1 Tm 1.12-16

4 MON Jesus said: I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: they will go in and out, and will find pasture.

Jn 10.11-15 1 Tm 2.5-8

5 TUE Jesus said: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Jn 11.1-45 1 Tm 3.14-16

6 WED Jesus said to Martha: I am the resurrection. The one who believes in me shall live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

1 Tm 4.7-11 Jn 12.23-26

7 THU Paul writes: The point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all people.

Mt 1.18-23 Rm 8.28-30

8 FRI The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means "God-with-us".

1 Tm 4.12-15 Jn 13.31-35

9 SAT Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.

Lk 14.25-33 Ws 9.13-18

10 SUN Jesus said: Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

2 Tm 1.1-7 Lk 4.1-13

11 MON Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into a flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self- control.

Lk 4.14-22 2 Tm 1.8-14

12 TUE Jesus read out these words of Isaiah the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has sent me to announce good news to the afflicted, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

2 Tm 2.1-7 Lk 4.31-37

13 WED Paul writes: Draw your strength from the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

2 Tm 2.8-13 Jn 3.13-21

14 THU St. Paul writes: If we have died with Christ, then we shall also live with him.

2 Tm 2.20-24 Lk 4.38-41

15 FRI St. Paul writes: A servant of the Lord must not engage in quarrels but should be welcoming to all and patient in adversity.

2 Tm 4.1/5-8 Jn 14.1-6

16 SAT St. Paul writes to Timothy: Proclaim the Word, in season and out of season.

Lk 15.1-32 1 Tm 1.15-17

17 SUN Coming to his senses, the prodigal son said: I will leave this place and go to my Father and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

Si 2.1-9 Lk 4.42-44

18 MON You who revere the Lord, trust in him, await his good gifts: everlasting joy and mercy.

Lk 5.1-11 Si 4.9

19 TUE Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

Lk 5.12-16 Si 14.2-6a

20 WED A leper implored Jesus, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can cure me." Jesus streched out his hand, touched him and said, "I am willing. Be healed!"

Mt 9.9-13 Ep 4.1-6

21 THU St MATTHEW As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him.

Ps 37 Si 16.25-29 Lk 5.33-39

22 FRI Make the Lord your joy: he will give you even more than your heart's desire.

Si 17.1-12 Jn 14.25-27

23 SAT God created human beings in his image; he has placed his light in their hearts.

Ps 113 Lk 16.10-13 1 Tm 2.1-8

24 SUN God is on high, but he bends down to both heaven and earth. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts up the needy.

Si 18.8/11-13 Lk 6.6-11

25 MON Human compassion extends to neighbours, but God's compassion extends to everyone.

Si 28.2-7 Lk 6.12-19

26 TUE Forgive your neighbour any wrongs done to you, and when you pray your sins will be forgiven.

Lk 6.20-23 Si 30.21-33

27 WED Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

Lk 6.27-35 Si 34.12-17

28 THU Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

Dn 7.13-14 Jn 1.47-51

29 FRI Daniel said: In a vision I saw one like a son of man and the people of every tongue and nation worshipped him. His kingdom is everlasting, it will never pass away.

Si 35.17-24 Lk 6.36-38

30 SAT The Lord will not be slow in the service of justice for his people. He will make them rejoice in his mercy.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 23,33-34

When they came to the place called "the Skull," they crucified him together with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing."

From the time he joined penitents going to John the Baptist to receive a baptism of repentance, Jesus entered into solidarity with sinners and those poor before God. He committed his entire life to manifest the Good News to them. Now he has no place on earth to live. After having been abandoned and denied by his disciples, condemned by the country's highest authorities, rejected by the people, he is nailed to a cross: the death reserved for slaves and criminals.

Yet he does not pay attention to this scandal, nor to the evil that is done to him. He does not complain about the suffering he undergoes. He does not think about the questions "why this unjustified evil? who is responsible for it?" He is entirely concerned with saving a relationship with each person. He does not imprison anyone in the evil that has been done. He believes in them more than they do in themselves. By this forgiveness, a reconciliation is already offered. It is in the peace and the light of the resurrection that this will gradually become accessible.

When we go through an inexplicable trial, when we feel forsaken by those in whom we had placed our trust, we can be surprised to find a violent reaction welling up in us. Sometimes we feel the need to get some distance, to allow some time to pass. Then we realize that forgiveness is not a natural attitude for human beings. But in such moments of crisis we can also discover that living a life of forgiveness means first and foremost letting the Risen Christ forgive within us.

All who choose to let Christ pray in them "Father, forgive" remain free of violence and bitterness. Free of distances, of an indifference that gives the illusion of protecting them, like armour, against a suffering which has become too unbearable. The heart remains alive: it can begin to hope anew.

- For what person or situation can I call upon Christ's forgiveness?
- With whom does forgiveness open for me a road to the future, the possibility of creating something with others over time?
- What other words or parable of Jesus help me to root myself in his forgiveness?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

OCTOBER

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Tm 6.11-16 Lk 16.19-31
1 SUN Paul wrote to Timothy: Fight the good fight of faith and win the eternal life to which you were called.

Heb 1.1-6 Lk 6.46-49
2 MON In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways. But in our time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

Heb 2.5-9 **Lk 7.1-10**
3 TUE Jesus, who submitted to death, is now crowned with glory. And the gift of his life, by God's grace, benefits us all.

Mt 11.25-30 Ga 6.14-18
4 WED Jesus said: Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Ps 34 Lk 7.11-17 **Heb 2.10-13**
5 THU Those who fix their eyes on God will become radiant; shame will no longer cloud their faces.

Heb 2.14-18 Lk 7.24-28
6 FRI Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Heb 3.4-6 Lk 24.1-8
7 SAT Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and hope.

Hab 1.2-3/2.2-4 **Lk 17.5-10**
8 SUN I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me and said, "The just will live by their faithfulness."

Heb 3.7-14 **Lk 7.36-50**
9 MON Encourage each other every day, so that none of you become hardened by the deceit of sin. For we shall come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the trust we had at first.

Heb 4.12-16 Lk 8.4-8
10 TUE Jesus is well able to understand our weakness. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin. So let us approach God with confidence, to receive his forgiveness and his love.

Lk 8.11-15 Heb 5.5-9
11 WED Jesus said: The seed is the word of God. The seed that falls on good soil, this is people who live according to the word and yield a rich harvest because they persevere.

Lk 8.19-21 Heb 9.11-15
12 THU Jesus said: My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.

Ps 46 Heb 10.5-10 **Lk 8.22-25**
13 FRI God is our refuge and strength, and an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be in turmoil.

Heb 10.14-18 **Jn 15.14-17**
14 SAT The Lord says: I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and wrongdoings I will remember no more.

Lk 17.11-19 2 K 5.14-17
15 SUN To the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus for healing him, Jesus said: Rise and go. Your faith has saved you.

Heb 10.19-25 Lk 8.43-48
16 MON Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for the one who has promised is faithful.

Heb 10.32-38 Lk 8.49-56
17 TUE Remember the first days when, after having received the light of faith, you stood your ground in the face of great suffering. All your belongings were seized, and you accepted this joyfully because you knew that you had better and lasting possessions.

Lk 10.1-9 2 Tm 4.9-17
18 WED St LUKE Jesus said to his disciples: Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, "The kingdom of God is very near you."

Heb 11.1-10 Lk 9.10-17
19 THU By faith, Abraham answered God's call and set out for the land he was to inherit. And he set out without knowing where he was going.

Heb 11.13-16 **Lk 9.18-24**
20 FRI Our predecessors in faith recognized that they were exiles and nomads on this earth. In this way, they showed clearly that they were in search of their real homeland. And God has prepared a city for them.

Heb 12.1-3 Lk 9.46-50
21 SAT Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.

Ps 121 2 Tm 3.14-4.2 **Lk 18.1-8**
22 SUN I lift my eyes to the hills: where is my hope to come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made both heaven and earth.

Lk 9.57-62 Heb 12.18-24
23 MON Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Heb 13.1-6 **Lk 10.17-22**
24 TUE Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have welcome angels without knowing it.

Lk 10.25-28 Heb 13.12-16
25 WED Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Heb 13.20-21 **Lk 10.29-37**
26 THU May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

Lk 10.38-42 Jr 1.17-19
27 FRI Jesus said to Martha: You are worried and upset about many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.

Mt 6.19-21 Jr 2.1-5
28 SAT Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

Ps 55 Si 35.12-18 **Lk 18.9-14**
29 SUN To God I call and he saves me, evening, morning and at noon. His peace delivers my soul, for he hears my cry.

Ps 73 Jr 3.19-23 Lk 11.1-4
30 MON You hold me by my hand, Lord, and guide me with your counsel. If I am with you, I desire nothing upon the earth.

Lk 11.9-13 Jr 6.14-16
31 TUE Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 23,46

Jesus is nothing but a dying body, hanging on the gallows. "He had no form or charm to attract us...we thought of him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God" (Isaiah 53,2-4). Almost everyone ran away from this vision of horror, a sign of definitive failure, of the futility of love. If he underwent such a curse, then God must have abandoned him; God expects nothing else from him!

In the face of death there is nothing to hope for, nothing to do. All has been said and done. And yet, through this last prayer of Jesus, we discover that he takes the initiative once again. Far from resigning himself to the fatality of destiny, he gives himself: "I entrust my life to you."

If in the eyes of all God seems to have gone away, for Jesus he is still the Father. The one who says to the Son, "You are my only Son; you are all my love." In other words, you matter more than anything; I look for my joy in you. Until the end, Jesus roots his life in this communion with the Father, in this expectation he has discovered in God.

It is this broken and dying body, a source of fear, that will express more clearly than any word and more powerfully than any miracles the authenticity of God's expectation, a source of communion. This wounded body will confirm the possibility of a faithful response of love which nothing can prevent or silence. All is given, everything expresses the gift. Then, at the empty tomb, people will realize that nothing was conceded to the absurd by resignation.

From that time on, every being, even the most wounded one, even in a situation of failure, can communicate something of Christ, can live out self-giving as the meaning of existence. Every situation, even the most definitive dead-end, can be the place where the mystery of death and resurrection breaks in.

Letting Christ pray in me "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit, my life," even when I no longer expect anything or when nobody expects anything from me, means already participating in his resurrection.

- Where can I perceive a reflection of the Father's expectation: in creation, in other people, in the poor, in a given situation?
- For whom can I pray these words of Jesus on the cross?

→ 2

NEW CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANS

The meeting was relevant for another reason too. After having struggled for political freedoms, the Churches are now at a new turning-point. Many sense that at present young people, who were often on the front lines, must be helped to build themselves up inwardly. They have to be put into contact with the sources of faith so that they can develop an inner life.

"Otherwise," explained a theologian known for his courage during the time of apartheid, "the most beautiful governmental projects will not succeed." In addition, the question has arisen: if Christians were able to unite to struggle against a common enemy, apartheid, what can now bring together people from different denominations?

AFRICAN CHANTS AND SONGS FROM TAIZÉ

Near the centre of Johannesburg, in a large sports hall turned into a place of prayer for the meeting, South African songs alternated with songs from Taizé. The worship was adapted to local mentalities. Words in Zulu were followed quite naturally by words in Sotho and in English. The South African songs nourished a whole people during the hardest times. "Either you are broken by suffering," an Anglican bishop explained, "or you draw deep from your faith to find the resources that will enable you to survive."

This deep faith came across in the beauty of the chants that, by their repetitive style, are similar to the chants of Taizé. Some are meditative. Others, begun by a single voice, explode in a movement of joy through the crowd that stands up to accompany the rhythm more freely with hands, arms, with movements of the entire body. A sonorous swell animates the grateful crowd. It is a powerful expression; nothing is exaggerated, in fact there is even a certain reserve.

At each time of prayer together, in the presence of Church leaders who included the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist bishops of Johannesburg, Brother Roger gave a short meditation translated into Zulu and Sotho. He was surrounded by children from the different ethnic backgrounds of South Africa.

"DARE THE GIFT OF YOUR LIFE"

In addition to the prayers and a group reflection on the sources of trust, two other important moments marked the meeting in Johannesburg.

Saturday afternoon, all the participants were together in the sports hall for a meeting on the topic, "With almost nothing, dare the gift of your life." This topic, taken from Brother Roger's last letter, was not at all abstract, since six persons explained what it meant for them in their own lives. First Judy, originally from Namibia, spoke of her arrival in Johannesburg ten years ago. A young teacher, she stayed with a rich family. Very quickly she felt concerned by the suffering of those in the streets. With the Methodist church in the city centre, she organized a team to bring medical care and food each week to the most destitute.

Judy was followed by Tudor: "I was born in a well-off white family in Johannesburg. When I was sixteen, I began to realize that most of my fellow South Africans did not share the same privileges I did. A few kilometres from my home, in the township of Alexandra, thousands of poor people were living in difficult conditions. I felt like the rich young man in the Gospel. I also realized that Christ's words were true: that there is a pearl of great price and it is worth selling everything to acquire it. I learned about what Judy was doing and with some others we tried to add other dimensions to this."

Now, Tudor devotes all his time to those who live in the streets. He looks for work and housing for them by visiting businesses, and coordinates development projects and the publication of a newspaper for the homeless.

"Now I am free," he said. "Last year, in a stadium, with many others, I spoke these words of Martin Luther King during the prayer of thanksgiving for the elections. Everywhere around me, during the celebration, black brothers and sisters held out their hands to me. I was overcome at the thought that those who held out their hands had paid such a high price for their freedom—the price of their own and their family's blood. And they were holding out their hands to me. I was humbled as I received freedom from them. Now, with that freedom and that humility, I can perhaps make my own the words 'With almost nothing, dare the gift of your life.'"

A SATURDAY SCHOOL

Another sign of hope was illustrated by some young people from the township of Sebokeng, located in the Vaal triangle. Two hundred of them participated in the meeting. Kubu, a young woman who was one of the group leaders, explained that no one would dream of associating that region, one of the most violent, with an expression of hope. And yet the witnesses who marked the meeting in Johannesburg most deeply came from there.

With other students and young teachers, Johnny, Kubu and David began a Saturday morning school in that township. The school receives no government funds; the teachers are not paid. Ten teachers prepare the students for their high school exams. If they pass these exams, they can enter the university. The first year, there were only nine students. The young teachers did not give up. And that perseverance allowed them to begin a new year with two hundred students, all hungry to learn and anxious to succeed.

JACKSON, MARGIE, AMELIA

Other examples followed, each more impressive than the others. Jackson, who came especially from Tanzania, explained his work with AIDS orphans there and what a group of young people is doing to keep the epidemic from spreading.

Margie, from Pietermaritzburg (Kwazulu-Natal), spoke of her work in a hospital with abandoned children. Some children have never known anything but the environment of a hospital. The association to which she belongs has managed to find families for almost all of them.

The final personal example was that of Amelia, the mother of a large family. She was born in Sophiatown, a district of Johannesburg from which Blacks were expulsed in the 1960s. In the 1970s, Amelia's political commitments forced her into exile, first in Botswana then in Zimbabwe, where the South African secret police continued to follow her. After a bomb nearly exploded under her husband's car, Amelia found refuge in the railway station with her seven children. She slept there every night for over three months. "Every morning I cleaned the public toilets in the station, the filthiest imaginable, then in these toilets I washed my children one after another and I washed clothes. During the day, I took refuge in the city park. As the rainy season approached a woman who was very moved came up to me: 'I don't want to know who you are or what you have done. But I see there is a storm approaching and I have sworn to myself that you will not spend one more day in this park.

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You and your children are going to come to my house.'

"I followed that woman, thinking she must be rich to take in a mother with seven children. I discovered that she lived with her six children in a two-room shack. As long as I was with her, that woman refused to take the money I offered her.

"'One day you'll need that money,' she told me."

A few months after having found a place to stay on her own, Amelia learnt that the woman who had welcomed her so generously was dying. "I hurried over to see her. I was in tears because I was going to lose the friend who had helped me so much. I thought about what I could do for her. 'I will take care of your children,' I said to her.

"'No, Amelia, don't worry. My family here will take care of my children. My body is suffering, true, but my heart is filled with joy. I know I have done what God expected of me. I ask you only one thing: when you have the opportunity, do for others what I did for you.'

"So I promised her that."

A political exile for seventeen years, Amelia went to university in Australia and began to work with refugees there. "I always wondered when I would be able to return to South Africa and put into practice in my own country the promise I had made." With the political changes in South Africa, she was able to return. Rather than living in the family home to which she was entitled, she chose to settle in a slum. "That's where I live now with my 14-year-old daughter, who still wonders why we have left our comfortable house in Australia. I promised work to the women in the neighbourhood who up to then spent their time gambling, but I had neither work nor money. Now we meet regularly in a dispensary where they are learning to knit and to make pottery. And I am happy that I have begun to fulfill my promise."

After these people spoke, the participants split up into small groups to share their responses to several questions, first about what they felt when they listened to these stories of people who are giving their life for others. What fears arise when I think about Christ's call to give the best of myself for others? What sufferings around me are a kind of call to act? What helps me to understand that with almost nothing I can do a lot?

"I THINK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN MY COUNTRY"

Sunday, after participants took part in the life of the host churches and before the final common prayer in the sports hall, a cultural forum was held. It was an occasion to discover the genius of each of the peoples present. Dances from Swaziland, songs from Soweto, Tswana skits—with joy each group shared an aspect of its culture.

Then a message was read which helped to show the importance of looking at other cultures in a positive way. It was written by Felix, a young man from Rwanda. In a refugee camp in Zaire, he heard on the radio about the meeting in Johannesburg and he wanted to send this message: "I think of my country and of Burundi and I want to tell you: never let your differences separate you. Many people here know about your meeting and place much hope in it."

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MANDELA

It is a great joy for me to greet Brother Roger and the Taizé Community, who have been linked by bonds of friendship with so many young people in South Africa for a long time. I was touched to learn that all the bells at Taizé rang out on the day of my liberation from prison.

For some time now the whole world has been watching us, and so what we achieve here has an impact that goes far beyond the borders of our own country.

I urge the younger generation, who have an important role to play in building a new South Africa, to accept responsibility and not give in to impatience or hopelessness, so that they may be a beacon of hope for many young people throughout the world who are searching for ways of building trust in the human family. By supporting and serving one another, we can go forward together, finding strength and joy in the solidarity that unites us.

Letter from Taizé

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